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NOVEMBER MEETING OF THE PROGRESSIVE GARDEN CLUB

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A radio interview between W. G. Campbell, Chief, Food and Drug Administration, and members of the Progressive Garden Club, delivered through WRC and 39 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, November 25, 1930.

SALISBURY:

Once again our Progressive Garden Club has gathered in session. This club of which all of you Farm and Home Hour folks are invited to become members, meets on the final Tuesday of each month for a radio session devoted to matters of home interest, particularly the beautification of the home grounds. Today we get a little bit away from our usual routine, and discuss facts that are close to the pocketbook of each family man or woman; the matter of how our food and drug supplies are protected by the enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act. The members of the club are here and the meeting is just about to begin. Here they are.

FIRST VOICE:

You ought to see our turkey, but, of course, it takes a big one for our family.

SECOND VOICE:

We are going to have duck for our Thanksgiving dinner -- duckling and apple sauce -- doesn't that sound good?

THIRD VOICE:

And we are going to have a home-grown Thanksgiving dinner at our house -- capon from our own poultry yard -- fruit and vegetables from our orchard and garden.

BEATTIE: (POUNDING WITH GAVEL)

The Progressive Garden Club will please come to order. How about filling up some of these great open spaces in the front rows? (Noise of shuffling of feet). There, that's better. Since our thoughts turn to food at this season of the year, it is quite appropriate that we should have as our speaker today the chief of the Federal Food and Drug Administration. It is my honor to present to you, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. W. G. Campbell, Chief of the Federal Food and Drug Administration. (Applause).

CAMPBELL:

The other day, I was talking with a charming lady who is influential in the women's clubs of our town. I asked her what her club is doing. She told me about two or three important campaigns for the betterment of our community.

(over)

Then she said that her club would appreciate suggestions for other programs of work.

I answered her this way. "You women buy foods and drugs every day. Why don't you start a "read the label" campaign?" I reminded her that there is much information telling how to read the labels on foods and drugs and this information is available to her and her fellow club members if they care to have it. The lady seemed somewhat bewildered. She confessed that she had heard nothing of this information, knew little about the Food and Drug Administration. She said that she had only a hazy idea about the pure food laws, and that idea centered around a statement that she had heard that these laws were no longer being enforced.

And so I told her a story ---

Back in the early "poison squad" days when the Federal Pure Food law had just recently been passed, and before the automobile became epidemic, people occasionally saw a dead horse lying in the street. For a long time such sights aroused no commercial aspirations in the minds of onlookers.

But one day, some misguided genius looked upon dead horses and a startling thought was born in his mind. He would haul them over to a certain suburb, work them over a little, and then sell the meat to unsuspecting buyers as "pickled beef." The deluded promoter who worked up this scheme naturally shrank from the searing light of publicity. He purported to be manufacturing glue and fertilizer. His so-called "beef" was a by-product, distributed, so to speak, in the dark of the moon.

But one day some food inspectors paid his plant a visit. They quietly unearthed evidence about this astounding business which soon put the plant out of action. We have not had any "dead-horse" beef since that day.

It is easy to see how people, scanning the daily papers for interesting and sensational news, would read such a story with indignation. And it was that kind of fine indignation, coupled with some knowledge of the quality, or lack of it, in foods and drugs sold 25 years ago, that brought the food and drugs act into being on a wave of popular approval. Nowadays, however, such sensational stories are few and far between. Twenty four years' operation of the pure food laws has cleaned up such disreputable business as I have just told you about. Twenty-four years' enforcement of the food and drugs act has practically removed from the market coffee beans made of tinted and hardened paste, rotten and filthy canned goods, swamp-weed patent medicines with no curative values whatever, and numerous other cheats. It is significant to know that today influential groups in the food and drug trades are actually lobbying in Washington for more stringent, more rigid, more sweeping regulation of their activities than is possible under the present food and drugs act. I cannot tell you in such a brief talk, many of the important things in the report of the activities of the food and drug administration in the fiscal year 1930. But I can tell you that enforcing agents of the pure food laws have worked from the beginning to check offenses of three different types:

No. 1. Offenses menacing the public health, such as manufacture and sale of foods containing added poisons and worthless medicines for serious disease conditions.

No. 2. Offenses against decency, such as the distribution of decomposed or filthy foods.

No. 3. Adulteration or misbranding, involving serious economic cheats, detrimental both to consumers and to honest manufacturers.

I am very pleased to see evidence of renewed public interest in the measures taken by your Government to insure you a wholesome, pure, and honest food and drug supply. This new interest may not equal the public interest which existed before the act was passed, and in the months immediately following the passage of the act. But this revival of interest does indicate a trend in popular approval of the act which may lead to amendments to make it more effective and to increase facilities for the enforcement of the laws.

Before I invite your questions, I want to say that we operate in two ways in enforcing this law. First, we follow the purely punitive method. This consists of criminal prosecutions of manufacturers operating in violation of the law, and seizures of goods which violate the law. Second, we proceed on the assumption that the average manufacturer wants to do the right thing. He wants to do the right thing not only because it is ethical, but because it is good business. A manufacturer's prosperity naturally depends on satisfied customers. It is suicidal for him deliberately to put out adulterated or misbranded foods and drugs, unless he is one of those rare individuals who figures that he can fleece the public while the fleecing is good, make his profit in a short time, and then, when apprehended by Government officials, pass on to a different field. Your Government believes that a judicious combination of punishing violators and educating the manufacturers is to the best interest of the public and the industries themselves. (Applause)

BEATTIE:

Our thanks to you, Mr. Campbell, for your explanation of the principals of the food and drugs act and its enforcement. I see several of these home-makers here who are anxious to ask you some questions and get some more information.

CAMPBELL:

I will be glad to answer them.

TEUTON:

Mr. Campbell, I am certainly pleased to learn that the food and drugs law is not a dead letter as I had heard. I think one way you can give us some convincing evidence on that point is to tell us what legal actions you have taken recently to enforce the law.

(over)

CAMPBELL:

A very fair question. I suppose my best answer would be to give you some of the statistics in the record of the fiscal year ended June, 1930. I have the figures right here -- let me read a few. In 1930, we brought criminal prosecutions against 63 food manufacturers, 49 drug manufacturers, and 56 stock-feed manufacturers. We also made 571 seizures of illegal foods, 314 seizures of illegal drugs, and 52 seizures of illegal stockfeeds. There you have a grand total during the year of 1105 prosecutions and seizures. That is a trifle more than 3 actions a day for each day in the year, including Sundays and holidays. But won't you let me expand my answer to your question a little? You recall that I told you that we think our educational work with manufacturers is exceedingly important. I believe that I can safely say that for every legal action taken against manufacturers and their products, 100 manufacturers have been educated as to the meaning of the law and voluntarily conformed with it so that no legal action was necessary.

Anyhow, you don't find nowadays on the American market any vinegar containing sulphuric acid (that is a poison), any sugar or flour adulterated with ground white stone, any confectionery colored with poisonous dyes, or other such gross violations of the law. Our limited staff of trained scientific workers and inspectors is over-worked, but efficient. Since 1907, these guardians of the public health have instituted more than 15,000 seizures and prosecutions for violations of the law. Better than that, they have shown American manufacturers in countless ways how to improve the purity of their products.

MRS. CARPENTER:

I noticed some time back that the words "Guaranteed under the foods and drugs act," were not on the labels of foods and drugs as they had previously been. Can't you explain to us why that statement is not there any longer? That may clear up some questions in our minds.

CAMPBELL:

The answer is simple, but I suppose that most of you have never heard it. We have taken that statement off of the labels -- that statement "guaranteed under the food and drugs act June 30, 1906," -- in order to protect you. We found that many housewives believed the guaranty statement meant that Government inspectors had examined every can or package bearing that legend and vouched for the purity of the food or drugs in the package. The guaranty did not mean that at all.

The purpose of the old guaranty legend was to protect the dealer from liability to prosecution if he was found selling foods or drugs violating the Federal Food and Drugs Act. The person we would be after was the jobber or manufacturer violating the law. He was the one who guaranteed the product and he was the one, not the dealer, to be prosecuted.

That was the object of the guaranty statement on the label. To protect the dealer. But of course it was often misconstrued. We used to receive

letters from persons who had found a package of spoiled food bearing this guaranty. Possibly the food when packed was of good quality. But, in shipment, it may have been damaged. While in stock in the store, it may have deteriorated. You can see that 61 inspectors can not examine every package of food or drugs sold to 120,000,000 consumers.

So our problem was still to protect the dealer and not to deceive you. In order to do this, we substituted a new regulation. Under this regulation the dealer can demand from the manufacturer, wholesaler, or jobber, a written guaranty that the foods and drugs he buys comply with the law. This regulation protected the dealer and also did away with the old deceptive "guarantee" statement on the package.

We do not think it is fair for a housewife to be deceived into thinking that her Government guarantees accidentally damaged goods or deteriorated goods. We want you housekeepers to exercise all due caution in buying foods and drugs, and not to think that every package is Government inspected. We want you to become familiar with the labels of the foods and drugs you buy, and to buy only after carefully reading the label.

(QUESTION).

Well, Mr. Campbell, I can see that your inspectors can't examine every package of foods and drugs. But, tell us, do they inspect every shipment, consignment, or allotment going out from food or drug plants?

CAMPBELL:

The answer to that question is NO. It would be totally impossible for 61 inspectors, working under the law, to examine every consignment, shipment or allotment of foods and drugs. Our inspectors do, however, take samples of foods and drugs imported into this country or entering into inter-state commerce within the country. Again let me turn to the figures here in my annual report. During the last fiscal year, they collected at the ports and carefully analyzed at port laboratories, 8,295 samples of foods and drugs. In addition, they made many thousands of inspections of food and drug consignments offered for entry. This, of course, does not include the thousands of samples taken of foods and drugs shipped from one State into another in this country. It is no longer necessary, in fact, to examine all consignments or all shipments of food. Most manufacturers are honest. They try to please their customers. As I have told you, they are actually trying to put more teeth into the food and drugs act itself.

However, new forms of violations of the law are constantly coming to light. Certain types of products generally demand more careful inspection than others. Taking the public health as their greatest concern, food and drug officials are alert to catch any evidence of violation of the law. No manufacturer is assured that an inspector may not visit him almost any day. An alert inspection policy, instituted in the beginning, has convinced about 99 per cent of our manufacturers that the Government is on their side so long as they operate legally.

(over)

TEUTON:

Mr. Campbell, how can we, the public, help fight the battle for higher quality, safer, and more wholesome foods and drugs?

CAMPBELL:

I was expecting that question. Here is my answer. You and every other member of the public can do your full share by reading the labels on foods and drugs more carefully. Under the law the labels must tell you the correct weight or measure of contents and inform you as to their quality and purity, in terms of food and drug standards formulated by your Federal officials through their 24 years of experience.

I believe that these labels are becoming increasingly reliable and useful to the homemaker. Some of our most important manufacturers, in fact, are now voluntarily trying to make their labels more informative and illuminating.

But you need to know what the food standards and drug standards are. It is our task to inform you. We are beginning to put these standards in popular language so that you may learn to understand the definition of the terms on the labels. I should be glad to send each of you copies of the information that we have so far compiled in nontechnical language. Many of you have heard it from the chief of our eastern district, Mr. W. R. M. Wharton, who addressed you on each Monday morning through a great many of these stations of the National Broadcasting Company network. But you need the permanent copy to refer to and to refresh your memory. When you learn these food standards and learn how to figure out the best buys from the net weight or contents statement on the labels, you will be receiving fullest benefit from your food and drugs act. You may still find some labels containing "jokers" statements that are on the border line between fact and fancy. The "joker" becomes apparent when you read the label carefully. We still find labels occasionally that violate the provisions of the act. When we do find such labels, we take immediate steps to correct them. Correcting them is half the battle. The other half is yours. Carry on your part by reading labels carefully and then by insisting that you get just what you want.

Many thanks for your attention and intelligent interest.

(APPLAUSE)

BEATTIE:

Your applause indicates how we have appreciated, Mr. Campbell, your illuminating discussion. This information will be of especial interest to most of us tomorrow when we do our shopping for our Thanksgiving dinner. The Progressive Garden Club now stands adjourned until Tuesday, December 30.

SALISBURY:

Do you wish to become a member by a remote control of the Garden Club? Then send in your request for copies of the "read the label" information offered today to members of the club by Mr. W. G. Campbell, Chief of the Food and Drug Administration in the United States Department of Agriculture. The next meeting will convene at 12:55 P.M. Eastern Standard Time or 11:55 A. M. Central Standard Time on Tuesday, December 30.
